

SUNFLOWERS AND BUTTERFLIES



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Illustrator: SUJASHA DAS GUPTA



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“Got it!” exclaimed Kanchan. She pounced on the orange and white Tiger Butterfly perched on the bush of sweet-scented pink roses. There were fresh white lilies, there were deep red poppies, there were bright yellow sunflowers—and there were butterflies, butterflies everywhere!



Kanchan looked at her hands. She had missed again. "If I creep up on it stealthily, I'll surely get it," she said to herself, as she tiptoed up to a Swallowtail. But this butterfly too flew out of reach just as she was about to swoop on it. Kanchan stamped her foot angrily.



“Ha! Ha!” laughed her little brother, Mohan. “Girls can never catch butterflies!” He was always teasing her.

“Just look at his silly, wide grin,” thought Kanchan. He has only caught two butterflies, but he’s dancing around as though he’s caught twenty!”

“It’s a silly game,” answered Kanchan and, shrugging her shoulders, walked off, nose in the air.





Kanchan sat outside her house, chin in her hands. She felt bad, and it was worse because of her stupid brother. She looked around. Her eye was caught by the bright colours in the garden. They were brighter and prettier than the butterflies. The sunflowers seemed to light up everything with their brightness.

Painting sunflowers would be fun. Easy too. Kanchan quickly brought out a large sheet of paper and some paints. She splashed on yellow for the petals and put in the black centres. Then she stood back to look at the picture.

“It’s the best painting I’ve ever done! It looks real! Just like the flowers!” she thought to herself.

“Hee! Hee!” laughed Mohan. But Kanchan paid no attention to him.

Kanchan sat gazing at her picture. The sunflowers looked so alive. They seemed to fill the world with sunshine. She was an artist! A gentle breeze blew over the garden, rustling the leaves.





A butterfly flitted by and sat on the sunflower—her painting! Kanchan didn't move a muscle. She held her breath.

“Should I catch it?” she wondered. The butterfly was so beautiful. It was black with white and red dots that looked like eyes. It opened and closed its wings as if showing off its loveliness.



Kanchan felt something light on her back. . .it crawled up and tickled her chin. She turned her head.



There was another butterfly and another —many, many more, all around her. Kanchan was thrilled. How gently they flitted around! Butterflies were her friends! She would not catch them.

She jumped up and took out another sheet of paper. If she could paint sunflowers, she could paint these friendly butterflies.

Kanchan painted with bold strokes. She painted with bright colours. She painted a lovely multi-coloured butterfly with golden and green wings.





Her painted butterfly seemed to dance before her eyes. It rose up and soared high on its delicate wings. It flitted gently past Kanchan's eyes, wide with wonder. It seemed to grow bigger and bigger, brighter and prettier.

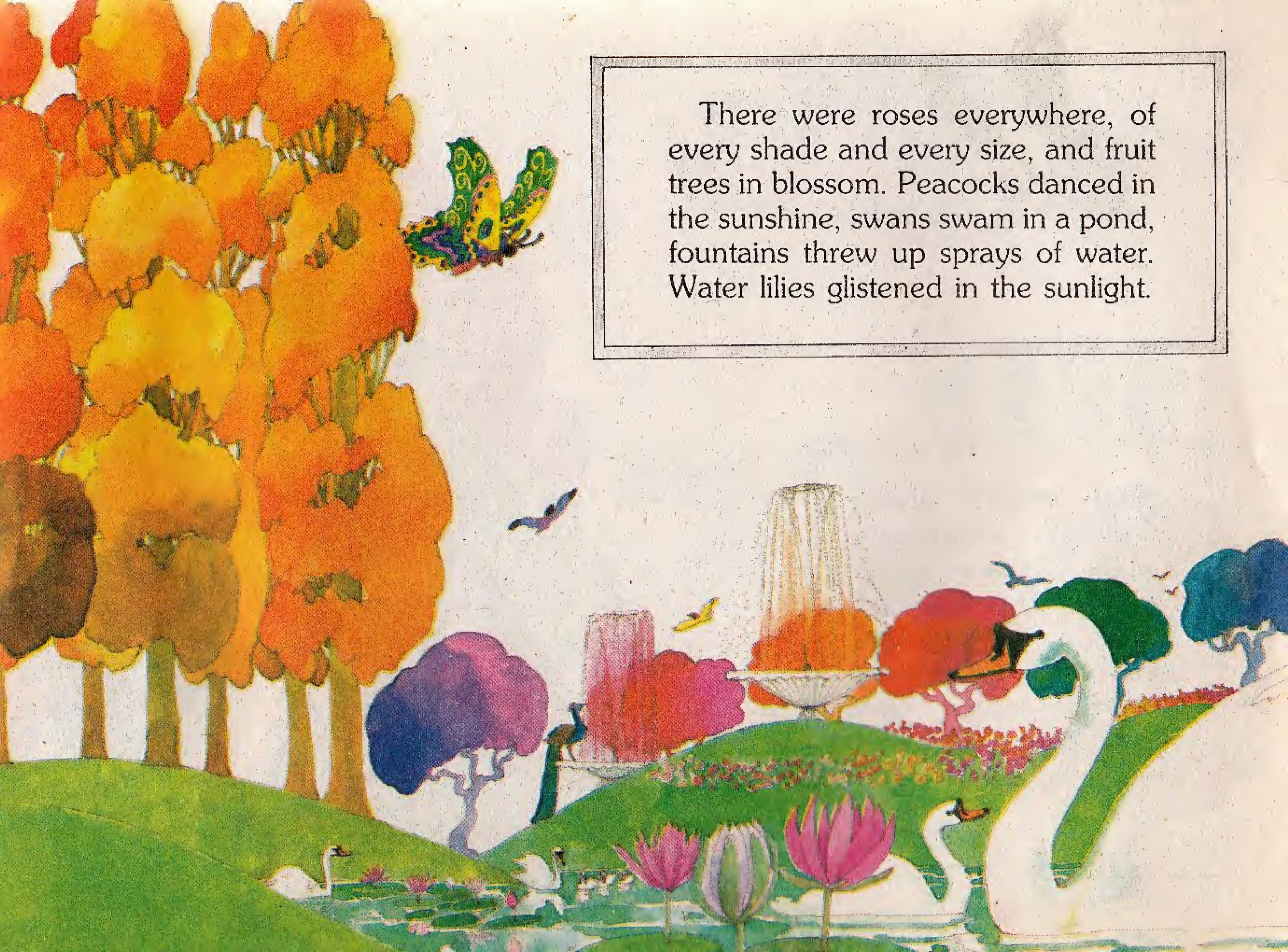
A strange feeling pulled
Kanchan along, and she
floated upward on its
beautiful wings.



Kanchan's butterfly soared over gently rolling plains. It seemed to glide with the wind. It weaved through tall poplars, and flew into a beautiful garden.



There were roses everywhere, of every shade and every size, and fruit trees in blossom. Peacocks danced in the sunshine, swans swam in a pond, fountains threw up sprays of water. Water lilies glistened in the sunlight.



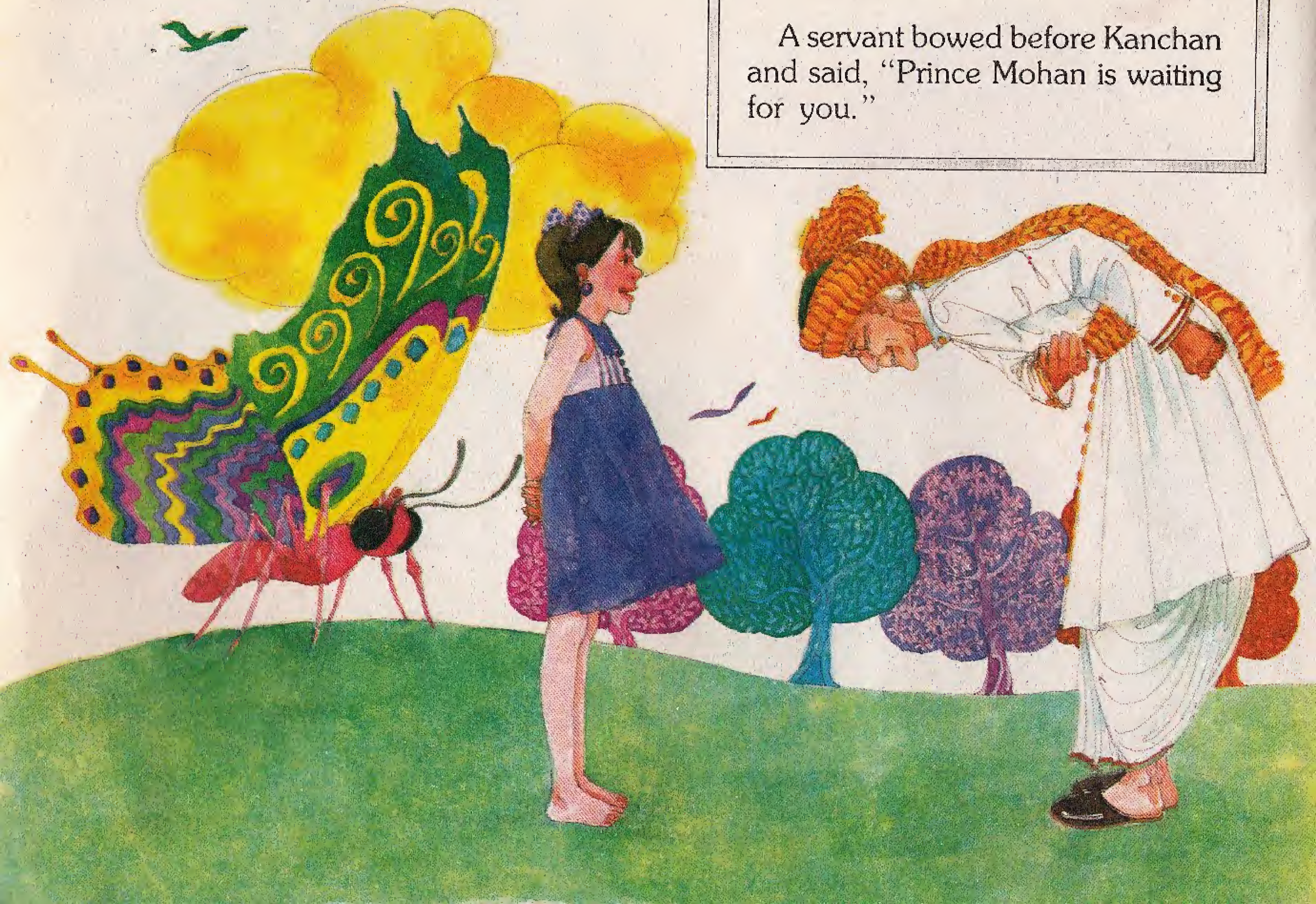


And straight ahead
stood a magnificent
marble palace with
arched windows and
slender pillars. There
were people everywhere
—women and men
dressed in beautiful gold
embroidered silks and
satins.

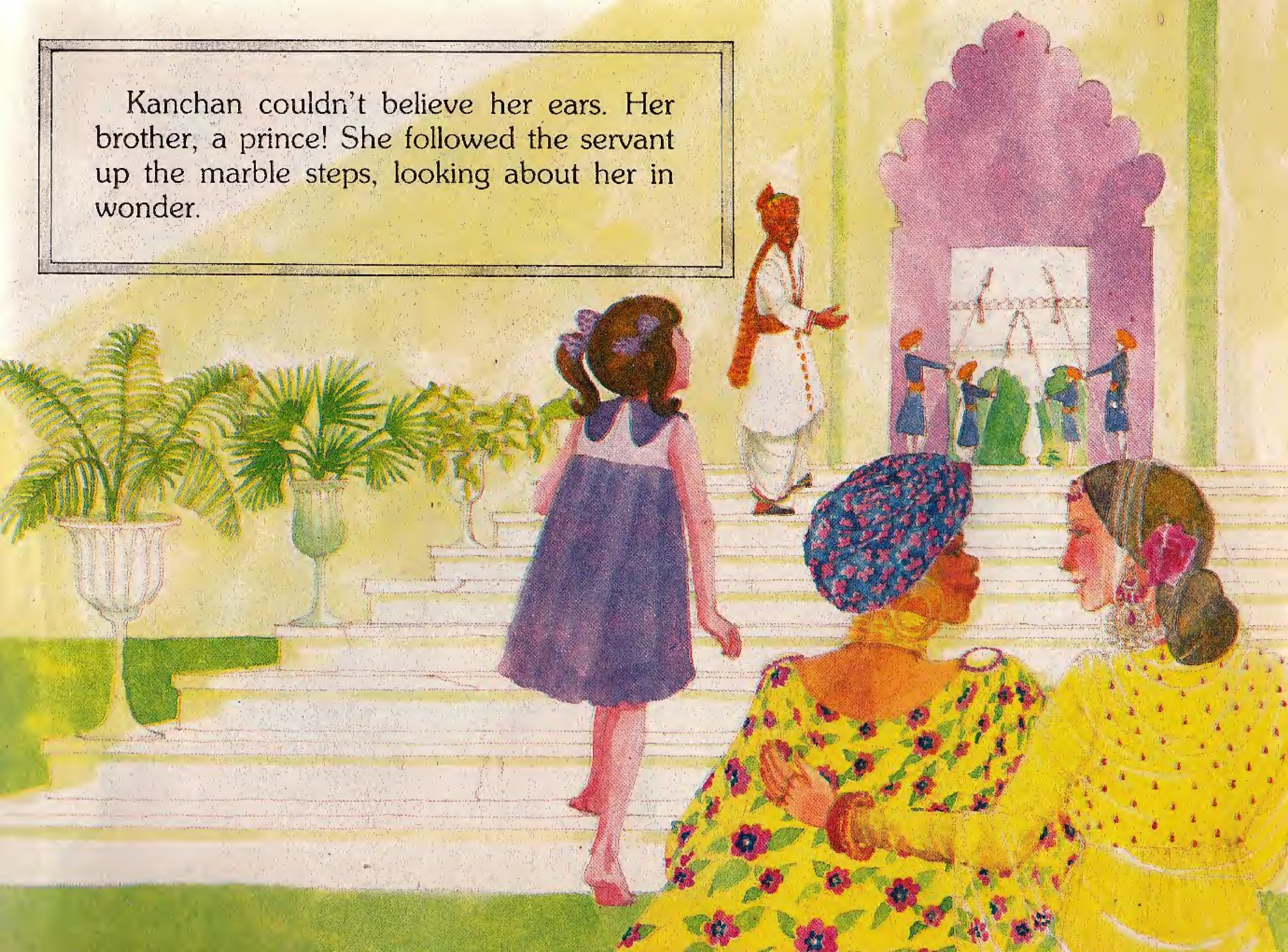




A servant bowed before Kanchan and said, "Prince Mohan is waiting for you."



Kanchan couldn't believe her ears. Her brother, a prince! She followed the servant up the marble steps, looking about her in wonder.







Prince Mohan sat on a golden throne, reclining against a large gold - embroidered satin bolster in a vast, carpeted hall. Next to him were two trays, one laden with fruit, the other piled high with mouth - watering *mithais*. The Prince wore a silken *achkan* and there were pearls and feathers on his turban.

"I have been told that you have caught the biggest butterfly in this country," Prince Mohan said rudely. "I must have it!" He jumped up and ran down the stairs.

Kanchan ran after him. "Wait!" she called. "I have to go home on it. Amma is waiting. Why don't you come with me?"



The Prince looked suspicious. Then he said, "All right," and they both climbed on to the butterfly

It soared into the sky and glided back into their garden, bright with sunflowers.



They climbed off the butterfly. Suddenly it started moving away.



Mohan shouted, "Catch it!
Don't let it go!" He jumped
and pulled at its wings—and
they tore!





Kanchan screamed! Amma came running. She took the torn painting from Mohan's hand and stuck it together. She put it up next to the painting of sunflowers. Kanchan looked happily at her pictures, and then at Mohan's sullen expression.

She took out another sheet of paper. "I'll draw, and you paint," she said to her brother.

At first Mohan glowered, then he smiled, and then they laughed together. Kanchan drew and Mohan painted. This was the best painting of all!



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